

OLYMPIA SCHOOL DISTRICT  
Balanced Calendar Exploratory Committee (BCEC)  
November 16, 2022 (Meeting #5 of 5)  
6-7:30 pm  
Board Room, 111 Bethel Street NE, Olympia

## **Meeting Notes**

### **Welcome, coming together**

J.Marie Riche, In-Person Facilitator, welcomed participants and thanked them for their participation in the Balanced Calendar Exploratory Committee, commenting that the options that have been looked at are “more balanced” but not actually “balanced,” meaning that this committee has not been exploring the idea of year-round school.

She reviewed the agenda and asked participants to think about where they would land if they had to make a decision in terms of support or opposition tonight, for the purposes of the breakout discussion groups that will happen later in the meeting. She asked those who are still neutral to think about which way they might lean.

### **Opening Remarks, Review our work together**

Dr. Patrick Murphy, Superintendent of Olympia School District (OSD), thanked all the participants, especially students, for taking time from their busy lives to engage in this conversation about the calendar. He also thanked the facilitation team.

He then pointed out that timing has an impact on the community’s conversation around this issue. For instance, if we ran the ThoughtExchange survey again now that the weather has cooled off, would HVAC be the same concern? Dr. Murphy continued that this conversation about the calendar began as we all recovered from a once-in-a-century pandemic. He recently met with Dimyana Abdelmalek, the Thurston County Health Officer, who shared that Covid-19 cases are down to 54 per 100,000 people over the last 7 days, and 90 per 100,000 over the last 14 days. Less than 5% of hospitalizations are now Covid-19-related. The State of Emergency is over. Through the pandemic, Dr. Murphy said, we learned that nothing is sacrosanct; everything is open to conversation. We developed an online model to deliver education. It was super hard, but it showed that we can do anything. We can look at other things. Similarly, is there a better way to do our calendar?

Some say we need to get back to normalcy; this is not the right time to do this. Others say this is the perfect time; everything is already shaken up. In Olympia, we never hesitate to consider the road less traveled. Is there a better way? Changing the school calendar would not be easy, but that alone is not a reason to avoid the conversation. He referenced his article for the community in last week’s Spotlight on Success, and paraphrased an African proverb by saying: “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to make it last a long time, go together.” Dr. Murphy expressed

his appreciation for everyone coming together, bringing their opinions and perspectives, and for engaging in this conversation respectfully.

Ms. Riche then reviewed the BCEC's work, beginning with the first meeting in September when the participants came together and looked for who else needed to be in the room and brainstormed the information that committee members wanted to learn more about. The Facilitation Team and Steering Committee then worked to deepen representation. In the second meeting, participants looked at what is meant by the term balanced calendar, identified additional information that would be important to learn in order to think about this idea well, and volunteered to form small teams to dig into the questions that have been raised.

In meetings 3 and 4, participants shared information with each other. Teamlet volunteers gave context and consideration to questions, such as what do employee association leaders think about this? What do students think about this? A student panel came with their questions and concerns. What additional considerations are there for community partners who run programs, child care, and athletics. We began to explore special considerations for families who are traditionally under-represented or underserved. If the district moves forward, when would be best to place breaks and how best to adjust summer. A panel came from Winlock Public Schools, a district that has adopted a more balanced calendar, shared their experience in going through the process of making the transition.

OSD has been using a grant from OSPI to explore this. Additional funds are available. A couple of the BCEC teamlets have suggested that the work continue with use of paid staff. For example, the Timing teamlet made suggestions that adding new breaks could be valuable, but thought lengthening existing breaks might be less disruptive. Recognizing they were not equipped to weigh all the considerations, they suggested the district pay union representatives and HR staff to build a sample calendar to show how the modifications might actually work in Olympia. This is one example of a next step that would involve a more focused group of people. The Teamlet that looked into Traditionally Marginalized and High-Needs Students and Families suggested that staff already established to connect with these families, family liaisons, set up focus groups to look at the calendar issues. Ms. Riche suggested that OSPI grant funds could potentially be used to pay for food and childcare in order to make these focus groups more accessible for the targeted families.

She also noted that, even if the BCEC recommends that the district keep the conversation going, changing the calendar will not happen overnight. One concern voiced is how will we make that transition. Dr. Murphy said that given the logistics, and depending on the actual calendar, if there are significant changes, there will be a lot of "runway" time. The board wants there to be no surprises. Such a change would involve bargaining with staff, additional conversations with parents, collaboration with childcare providers, and a regional approach. The earliest Olympia would consider such a change is likely 2024-25. If the board wants to go ahead, and the BCEC recommends it, there would be a lot of work to do.

### **Form breakout / table top groups**

Ms. Riche outlined the process for breaking the BCEC participants into groups of 4-5 based on their opinion about whether the district should adopt a balanced calendar. Each group is to

develop a list of pros and cons. There remained three attendees, including Superintendent Murphy who remain firmly neutral on the idea. Those people were put into a group together and also asked to consider what it would take for them to form an opinion. Ms. Riche and Frank Kwan, Zoom Facilitator, organized the groups in the room and online.

## **Brainstorm Pros and Cons**

### **Group #1, Intrigued / Supportive**

Thoughts about the process:

- More info is needed. We haven't heard enough to say stop. There is more exploration to do, especially if there is money to pay people.
- Concrete calendar example(s) would be useful.
- Hearing the panel from Winlock was a key factor in developing support; we would like to hear from others who are doing this.
- Would like to hear more about the social/emotional impact. We want to hear more; we have been focused on the academic

Pros:

- Continued learning opportunities
- More consistent access to resources
- Financial burden of child care spread out
- Mental health for students & teachers / staff

Cons:

- Child care availability
- HVAC / clean air

### **Group #2 (Zoom) – Intrigued / Supportive**

Pros:

- Mental health, less burnout, less anxiety for both students and adults; help people stay in education longer.
- Intersessions can improve academics & students' engagement in academics by supporting students before they fall too far behind.
- The financial burden on our most vulnerable families may be reduced by shortening summer child care and adding in intersessions free of charge.
- Intersessions could provide opportunity for innovation in teaching/learning
- **HVAC concerns** - We struggle to elevate this concern into a deciding factor. Many of our students live in housing circumstances that do not include climate control such as a/c. The schools tend to be better environments, even without a/c, at keeping a generally tolerable environment. Also, the difference between the last week of August and the first week of September aren't drastically different w/r to climate and weather. Same with the middle and end of June.

### **Group #3 – Concerned / Opposed**

Cons:

- The region isn't ready
- We haven't defined the problem we are trying to solve; there is no good data
- We haven't exhausted all the other options for improvement

- Current staff not wanting to teach at intersessions
- Other jobs during the summer – teachers, students, paras, etc.
- Costs for intersessions; HVAC
- Lots of other changes lately
- No robust summer program lately; with a shorter summer, not enough time to plan one
- Loss of instructional time with more transitions
- Many changes lately - stress

Pros:

- Help with burnout
- Opportunity to do research about the idea – not much has been done
- Continue talking about issues, such as learning loss
- Need a well thought-out plan, sample calendar, communications plan

Other thoughts:

- We need a robust summer plan
- We need the right decision for kids, staff, and parents

#### **Group #4 (Zoom) – Concerned / Opposed**

Pros:

- Does not extend school year. It would just mean starting earlier.
- More frequent breaks for staff and students. Less teacher burnout.
- Less opportunity for learning loss (maybe). More studies needed.
- Challenges Status Quo, trying something different could be good.

Cons:

- Needs to be a regional decision.
- The state of funding would make it difficult for us to fund intersession times. The intersession times are what makes a difference for academics. Why can't we do summer school instead at schools with HVAC systems?
- Lots of instructional review needed due to numerous breaks.
- HVAC issues.
- Childcare challenges.
- Loss of time for summer employment for students and staff.
- It would be difficult for students to have to undergo another massive change in schooling. This would be hard on student and staff mental health.

#### **Group #5, - Intrigued / Supportive**

Pros:

- Social-emotional benefits
- More connection with children and families – more consistent access to resources (big benefit to marginalized groups)
- More eyes on children to prevent abuse and neglect
- More opportunity for extracurriculars, etc. / Resources
- Less learning loss – more opportunity for remediation
- Special ed – mostly benefits related to IEP growth
- More frequent breaks – benefit to teachers (teacher perspective)

- Any research of 45 day schedule benefits all scores math, for all other subjects for marginalized students

Cons:

- \*Lack of information / misunderstanding of what this could look like; make sure everyone gets the info.. A sample calendar would be helpful
- Lack of knowledge related to research on the benefits

Other thoughts:

- We should focus on emotional well-being of students. Get them to weigh in.
- Going forward make sure students have all the research and benefits to them and others.

### **Group #6 – Concerned / Opposed**

Pros:

- Intrigues some staff and students
- ???help with burnout and fatigue

Cons:

- Sounds expensive, underserved schools are already short on funding/ staffing
- Why not put the intersession support for students of need during our current breaks
- Increased breaks, increases disruptions during the school year–less consistency during
- Difficulty coordinating childcare during breaks for working families
- Difficult adjustments for summer camp programs and college interns that support those programs
- Difficult for split families with parenting plans in different regions
- Financial impact on students/ families needing the income support offered by a full summer break
- Staff burn-out
- NW weather not great for breaks; vacations in March different from those in June / August
- Lack of data on the problem that is assumed (learning loss)
- Lack of data that going to this model improves learning for a district our size

Question:

- What other options are there for increasing student support without the intersessions?

### **Group #7 – Neutral**

Pros:

- Could address learning loss?
- Could provide academic support opportunities?
- Could provide enrichment opportunities?
- Could help with mental health?

Cons:

- It would be really hard to get regional agreement.
- Costs: HVAC, paying staff for intersessions.
- Could contribute to learning loss?
- Could further divide the community?
- How pay for intersessions?
- Impact to summer employment
- Childcare

What would it take to form an opinion?

- Research and data most people agree on
- A clear majority of all groups wanting to move forward
- Kick-in of other districts
- Being clear in our communication and acknowledging the pain points of change; being good listeners
- A pilot of something smaller to see if it works. Examples: Winlock just made a 2 weeks change. One suggestion has been a re-enactment of winter break.

### **Notes from participants that were emailed to add to the conversation:**

- I'm not sure about the argument people are making about "what's the problem we are trying to solve?" I feel like the whole conversation is around improving the learning environment/outcomes and addressing the mental health crisis in our schools. The idea is to do better, not necessarily that something is wrong now.
- My final thoughts are that I would personally support a balanced calendar, but would need to be reassured that there would be upgrades to HVAC systems, regional adoption, guaranteed supports during breaks for students with disabilities, and a reasonable timeline that gives families plenty of notice to adjust their calendars.

I would recommend that the board approve taking further steps, including communication with other districts, getting estimates for hvac upgrades and potentially pursuing a tax levy to fund them, and to have the Family Liaisons, McKinney Vento Liaison, and Bilingual Family Engagement Specialists do a comprehensive deep dive into how marginalized families will be impacted and how they can be supported.

### **Closing Thoughts**

Ms. Riche thanked participants for their reports and commented that the interest the groups demonstrated in their discussions made it more helpful to ask for participants to express anything unsaid or reflections rather than seek area of common ground and disagreement. Participants shared the following:

- I discovered through this process that I don't know as much as I think. It has been interesting to hear everyone's ideas. There is lots of "brain" walking around out there.
- We need to define the problem we're trying to solve. That will inform our decision. We need a different perspective.
- We have seen lots of change; it is hard to think about this without others in the region involved. Timing is everything; this is a tough ask right now.
- It would have been helpful to have an evidence-based research group and experts looking into the bargaining groups. This is a tough task for us without expertise.
- It would be helpful to know if there is a specific population we are trying to serve. Can we target them with a balanced calendar?
- This is like a school assignment with one big question and lots of smaller questions inside. You have to solve the smaller ones to get to the answer for the big question. It might be the balanced calendar won't solve it all.
- There is evidence supporting this; this is why we are here. Part of the reason we are thinking about a balanced calendar is learning loss – how to solve it. As a counselor, this feels like a no-brainer. Elementary school is more like a community center. Long breaks are hard and not pleasant.

- A couple of groups said there is no actual problem we're trying to solve. For me, it helps with mental health crisis, the idea of teacher burnout, the feeling that the educational field is overwhelming for staff, students, administration. This is not solved by taking one step, but noting the step is not helpful. The problem could be helped. Maybe being a little different could attract teachers. We need to do something different – intersessions with no childcare could help families. It is hard to define a single problem to put this around.

## **Next Steps**

Ms. Riche outlined the steps ahead for the BCEC process. The Facilitation team will draft a final report and work with the Steering Committee to refine the structure and content of the report. The report will be sent out to BCEC participants before being finalized. At this point BCEC participants will be asked not to wordsmith but to see if the report catches the important ideas and represents the process honestly and accurately. "Did we get it right?" There will be roughly ten days to review the report and give feedback, in early January. Once it is finalized, the report will be given to the superintendent to share with the school board. She thanked all the attendees at the fifth and final meeting for participating fully through to the end.

## **Closing Remarks**

Dr. Murphy especially thanked the students who participated and expressed appreciation for their thoughtful comments. He drew attention to one student's closing comment about the big question containing many smaller questions. He noted the idea of trying to swat a fly with a sledge hammer, but commented perhaps we are trying to break up concrete barriers, and a sledgehammer is needed.

To the question that was raised by a number of participants in this meeting, he stated that he sees "the problem we're trying to solve" as being broadly defined in two parts: to support struggling learners and to improve mental health. But we don't yet know exactly how the calendar might affect these issues. There is a need to dig deeper.

Dr. Murphy reminded participants that the BCEC is not a decision-making body, and assured participants that everything will be taken to the school board. He closed by reiterating sincere thanks to all participants and the Facilitation Team.

The meeting adjourned at 7:30 pm

### **BCEC Participants Attending:**

Jade Austin  
 Jennifer Cole  
 Scott Cushing (Zoom)  
 Quinn Dickason  
 Tad Earley (Zoom)  
 Jayme Fierro  
 Kaylin Furry  
 Sandy Hallstrom  
 John Hanby (Zoom)  
 Bonnie Haushka (Zoom)  
 Leslie Huff (Zoom)  
 Robbi Kesler

Ava Miller (Zoom)  
Suzanne Miller (Zoom)  
Abby Neumiller-Hanell (Zoom)  
Jeff Pearson  
Sarah Pearson  
Steve Roth  
Allison Weide  
Frank Wilson  
Chris Woods  
Heather Slater (Zoom)  
Condee Wood (Zoom)  
Dana Woods (Zoom)  
Karen Zarate (Zoom)